

Jim Nagy

Today is January 23, 1996 and I'm (Bob Short) interviewing Jim Nagy at his home just outside of Sebastopol.

Jim, where were your parents from and when were they born?

In Hungary, around 1895-96. Do you know what your mother's maiden name was? Yeah, Horvath.

Where does your family come from?

Hungary. Both of them are several generations back there from Hungary.

How about your father, where did his family come from? Hungary also around Budapest and southern Hungary. In fact, mother where she was born and my sister, its in Serlia in Yugoslavia now. Its now Sebia, Voyvodina province was what it was called. The family was from the old austro-Hungary Empire. Do you know how they met and married? Yeah, back then they went to trade school after the eight grade, instead of high school, they pick a trade, and my dad turned out to be a cabinet maker. My mother was working as a young girl in Budapest for some family as a home cleaner, maid and they met through their families, actually. They are both from the farming, agricultural area in there. What were the circumstances that brought your family to this area? When they first got married, he (his dad) got an arthritic problem or aches in his bones, some part of his body his doctor told him to go to California and I guess he probably meant southern California. The only reason they came here is they had relatives in Hessel in south Sebastopol. It helped him a little bit but not that much. He already had the problem but he didn't have to take that much medication for it. Did your family come over to New York and cross-country? My dad came over a year earlier on the White Star Line and through a move ... Ellis Island. They came across country? Yeah, they crossed country. They didn't come through the canal. Did they tell any stories about their trip cross-country? My mother said she was seasick all the way. It was the time of year when the Atlantic was pretty rough and she had never been on a ship before. It didn't bother my sister, she was just a baby and it didn't bother my dad. No story- they traveled the lowest class they could possibly get actually they were pretty packed in. That was the days of the emigrants after WWI, when they were really coming through the country. When did they come over? 1921 or 22 or even maybe 1923 for my mother and sister. She's 5 years older than I am. What did you dad do to make a living here? He worked for Bridgeford Planning Mill, one of his first jobs that I can recall and it was where Pellini Chevolet is now. This was before the depression, in the 20's, during prohibition and that place burnt down in 1928 or so. He was a cabinet maker glasser for things like window selves. He went down to Petaluma to work after that with Bridgeford's son, young Jack and then we moved to Cunnigham. He was buying a place down there, a little acre and a half and raised 5, 00 chicken and worked his job in Petaluma and the depression his and young Bridgeford, he partner, ran off with the money and we lost the place and came back into town and started renting until he could get his foothold again. So, your family was a part of the chicken egg revolution? Yes, he got into that just for a little extra money, also a few an apples and a few berries on the place and we had an outhouse and we had no running water. We had a windmill, with a pump. We had the gather the water and carry it in. Us kids had our chores even though we were small. Where

were you born? I was born in Petaluma ... across from where the hospital is now, just about 562 Petaluma Ave. The house is in one of the photographs in Evelyn's McClure's new book, still standing and people are renting it and we were seating at that time. That's before we moved to Cunningham and that was in 1927 probably. I was born in '26 and my brothers that's a year older, he was born in '25 at that same house though. You were born in a home rather than a hospital? Yeah, they had a hospital in town across from Safeway, just south of the Masonic Lodge there. They called it Hillside hospital. ... there was for people who were sick but most person in those days were at home. We had a doctor in town, is Dr. Marsh who was our family doctor all through my growing up. After the was somebody else took over for him. In fact, Dr. Powers Davidson, our family doctor, they are descendants of that practice more ~~careless~~, taken over and buying out and so forth. Do you have any brothers and sisters? I have a sister who I said earlier came over with my folks. She's born in 1921 in Hungary, *is in* Bismark, where my mother was born and lives in Santa Rosa, she is still living. She's a widow... She lost her husband several years back and she has a few kids, she has four actually, two boys and two girls, just like I do and then my brother~~s~~ he got killed in an automobile accident on Montecito Heights in Santa Rosa when he was 42 years old and he would have been 70 going onto 71 years now. So that's quite a while back you said you fit in the lineup as the youngest? I'm the baby of the family, right. Actually all my brothers and sisters and my mother and father were not than big of people but on my mother's side she had a 6 foot brother. That was Bill. That's who I'm named after because my first name William but I go by Jim because that's what they started calling me when I was a kid, Jimmie, yeh.

What's your earliest remembrance? In Cunningham. I don't remember where I was born that Petaluma area-because I was probably just a couple of years old but I remember what we called the "Ranch" in those days. Just that acre and a half and being there and I remember the pumphouse. I remember the cemetery back of the place, there's an old there's old cemetery. I remember our neighbors. I remember that one of them raised pidgeons; the other has a dairy, had a dairy and across the street from us on Gravestien highway south down south of Hessel Road, actually is where we lined and I remember go to the school for the first three grades at Mount Vernon. I started there. Actually I went there to visit with my brothers because he started school so after a couple of weeks I stayed there and the teachers said I was o.k. in kindergarten, 'cause we didn't go by chronological age at that time and she says, "well, your doing the same work as the first graders and we don't have a kindergarten, so you're in the first grade." And so my mother said, "well okay." She's from the old country. She didn't know any difference. So I went there and my brother was sick the next year and he stayed back in the second grade and I went ahead. So, he was always a year behind me and a year older in school. But that's the first recollection was just prior to going to school because I was about four or three. I remember very very well "... I remember we had a German Sheppard and he got killed out on the highway. It was very realistic to me. There was a in front of the house and in those days the road wasn't straightened out as it is now and very curvy and in fact, right below us they call it "death curve", where Llano Rd. comes into Gravenstein Highway. And we kept this dog on a chain. My brothers and I ran across the highway to across the neighbors. We just started across the highway and my brother was a head of me. And the here that dog comes flying over my head, hit my brother out of the way across the

highway and the car hit him, killed the dog so to this day I don't know why and my folks they were really shaken up by this ordeal. I was pretty young so it didn't bother me that much except for losing a dog and crying over it for a day or tow. So you're family was grateful it wasn't you?

Yeah, or my brother. Exactly. How far was the school from your home?
Oh, let's say half mile.

And how did you get to school?

We walked right on the highway- well along side the highway. Yeah, there was no transportation. Right, because it was right in Cunningham where the, I think its called the Antique School Bell or something like that.

Its one of the redo buildings?

Yeah, on the east side of the highway. Yeah.

The next question is where was the school located and is it still there? Yes? Yes?

Yes, the building is still there, the school is not being used as a school. Its park of Gravenstein's school district now. It is a three room school house. They had a first through third, fourth through sixth, and seventh and eighth in those sequence in rooms.

How many were in your grade?

Oh, probably, I'd say six or seven, in my particular grade, not in the... bus in the one room with all of us is would be probably fifteen or sixteen, seventeen maybe in the three classes.

"My experiences in a three room school house was fourth and fifth grades. We had four of us in the fourth grade." Oh is that right. Yeah, I'm just guessing maybe we did have hour. I really don't know. Seems to me that there were about fifteen kids in the building in our classroom. I didn't know how it was broken up but I thought there was more of us in the first grade then there was in the second and third. I don't know why.

What was the most interesting thing that happened to you while you were in elementary school?

Oh, I don't know. I think its probably traveling down the city to visit relatives because earlier I talked about my dad coming to Sebastopol because of his relatives. Well, they had moved to Oakland. So, we'd go down on weekends. In those days we didn't have any bridges and we had the ferries-so that was actually a good trip for us. And also that being people in those days, we didn't travel that much and another incident too, we went to Eureka and time as a youngster, I was still in elementary school and I think I was still in Cunningham, I'm not sure or else we'd just moved back in town but it was an airplane flight. My dad took up. They had the ...and now you'd call them Cessna or Cubs and my brother and I and my dad went up above Eureka and they had a Half Moon Bay Arcade. I think it was. Yeah, we took a little flights and that was real-as a youngster that was something else because we never did have that really. I'd say well to do where we could do a lot of traveling or anything, where my dad was trying to make his mark and raise a family. So actually, then there's other things that came

along as I got older in elementary school but the elementary school to me was going through the eighth grade. And then there was a little shock for me when we moved back in town and I had to go to a bigger school which would be Sebastopol Elementary School which is now Park side they call and that was just being built when I started there. We used to have a three story schoolhouse in back of that in those days. (Sebastopol Elementary) I remember when the seventh and eighth and maybe the sixth in that new school, possibly cause it was built around '36, '37, maybe '35 cause I didn't get out until '39. But those are about the...until I got to high school and then more things started happening. I was growing up and traveling and other two incidents, that's all. The airplane flight and then going to Oakland-we went down and stayed the weekend. We just couldn't go down like we do now and come back the same day.

It must have been very thrilling to be flying to Eureka in those days?

Well, we didn't fly to we drove up and just took a flight one where you pay two bucks or something like that. No, no. We drove up to visit somebody. They had a zoo up there. I remember going to that, the Old Carson House. And then while we were there it was brought up that we'd take this airplane flight which in a Stearman or something and then just take the flight, room for four people the passenger and my dad and us two kids. That was it.

What types of chores did you do around the home?

Well, when I was younger, of course, we had things to do. We had to clean out the outhouse. I can remember that and the chicken house, too, cause we had that-we did have chores there. Pick apples and then my dad would do the pruning on it if it had any to do, we would pick up brush out there. We'd did have some chores, too. We had to keep their cages clean and then when we moved back in town we, I went to elementary school in Sebastopol and started in the fourth grade, then we had to cut the lawn, keep the lawn and we had to wash windows on the outside and do anything else my dad wanted us to do, keep us busy besides having magazine routes and then I'd cut lawn for other people-did to earn my own money. Cause if I wanted a bike, I had to get it myself-which I did-I bought a second hand bike-it's the only bicycle I ever had. I kept until I was in high school. But, we did odd jobs for people. Then of course the chores at home. And we helped my dad out because he was remodeling that one house that we lived in Sebastopol - the last one we lived in and he added to it so we had to help him with packing the lumber and bringing whatever tool he called for and that type of thing.

And where did you live in Sebastopol?

After we got back from the ranch, we lived on Petaluma Ave. Again, about two yards from the old Columbus Lumbered company. That was for a year or two. Then he started buying another houses during the depression up on top of Calder and Parquet, that's a short dead end street and it's a corner lots and corner lot was empty which belonged to him and the house and so he built a big garage up there and then put an apartment on top of that too. But that's where I lived when I went to elementary school, Park side, and when I went to high school and until I went into service during WWII. Then they moved from there while I was in the service, went to Hacienda up on Russia River. My dad bought a little place up there and wanted to make a little investment and add to it and he'd work from there.

How far was it from your home to Park side?

Oh, that was just a couple of blocks, cause we'd cut through-we didn't have to walk the streets-we'd have to walk through a couple of empty lots and by Ames's where he has the corral of horses, then across Ives Park which was not Ives Park at that time and another half block to the school.

How about when you went to high school?

I'd walk from up top of the hill to all the way up to the high school which is probably ten blocks. The blocks were not all the same sizes and kitty-corner or then later sometimes I took my hike because nobody had care in those days except maybe some of the more influential people in town, the banker, the Laukep resident's kid or somebody who owned a grocery store's kid or somebody whose dad had a garage and a couple of cards. And actually most of the cars probably came from people that lived out of town. And there's just one parking area, really, across from the school but not many cars, mostly bikes and they had school bus transportation. Bt the kids used to busses before that on the electric train.

The train was still running when you went to high school?

Oh, no. no. But I did ride it when I was a kid we I lived out on the ranch cause that's when it deceased. I used to go with my mother shopping, my brother and I. We'd go get the train at Hessel station there was MacFarlene Ave. There's Mac Farland Lane and there Mac Farlane Ave in Sebastopol and a MacFarland Ave off of Hessel Road by the railroad tracks and we'd catch it there, walk over there and that was about a $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile or so. We'd take the train to Santa Rosa, seemed like it would be all day and come back.

What kind of work did you do during the summer?

Picked apples, naturally, which most the kids did. Pick prunes, picked hops with the family. When I was younger. When I was young the boys were already gone and picked berries and that's about all I picked. As far as the fruit. I worked for the railroad. We'd out on the summertime. They have one of those up and down hand cars and we'd go out and repair tracks and that type of thing and I worked for what used to be Carlson's Department Store. It was Hoppers at the time and I worked there after school and Saturdays and sold shoes and helped the bookkeeper keep books cause I was taking a kind of a what we called in those days a Commercial course instead of a College Prep, typing, shorthand, office practice, and all that and I worked a dryer right around the corner here down on Occidental road for Jack Rego his name is and he had the old Okamoto dryer and I'd weigh in the fruit as it come in and there that's about it but I worked all the time, anything you could fine doing really. Also picking apples in sacks. What we usually picked off the ground. The kids they wouldn't pick off the trees-they'd get the good pickers to do that- I'd haul- I don't know whether you know where Pinecrest school is. That's the one there off of Litchfield up Hayden and all the way over to Fircrest. That used to be called the Roher Orchard for Chester Rohrer - his dad and that's where we picked most of our fruit. And I think I did pick some out of Frederickes Road, my folk's Hungarian friends. We would go out there to visit and my mother or father would take us out and during the weekend we'd pick apples.

Did you work during school time?

Yeah, after school whenever I wasn't playing ball, cause I was getting into sports quite a bit. I'd start at 5:00 or whenever, I had flexible odd jobs or I did say still sell magazines, Saturday Afternoon Post and Liberty and those were a nickel in those days.

"You and I are contemporaries, I know."

"Yeah, right. That was just one of the things kid's did. We worked.

In Cunningham, where did you buy your groceries and supplies?

Well, actually, they had a grocery store in Cunningham. I was probably a little bit higher or my dad when he worked, he would pick up the stuff on the way. My mother never did drive so whenever time she had to go to the grocery store or anything, she always walked. That was right near the school, across the street from the school so she would have to walk about ½ mile and they didn't have carts in those days so she had to carry them, a bottle in each haul or the kids, my sister would go and we'd help carry the groceries back. Or we'd take a little wagons and that's just the way it was or my dad would pick up the bulk. She would tell him what she need. Then we would do it whether he was working in Sebastopol or whatever Petaluma and he stop in a get a thing that would save her some, but the groceries for her were flour, and that type of thing or she made bread. We already bough bread. We made our own butter. That's another thing, I remember churning it and she got her own milk because out at the ranch, we did have a cow or we would get it across the street- the guy had a dairy. We'd go over and get fresh milk or something like that if we didn't get enough from our own cow or before we got the cow. In fact, when they first moved in before I was born they lived above that grocery store. That's the first place they lived, the apartment there and it's still there. It's a trading post turn antique shop now, too, Lone Pine Antiques or something 'cause that's where Lone Pine comes in Sothey lived in the apartment above that store that's still there.

Was going to town a family event?

Well, yeah I guess it all depends on what town. Not after we lived in town but prior to living in town, yes. Especially if you went to Santa Rosa. We had my Godparents who lived over there so we went over there as often as we could. They lived out in the area of Montgomery Village. Not soon much to Sebastopol.

When did your family get their first car or truck?

My dad had a ... he got a car when we were ... the ranch. I remember it was a Model A. I don't know if he had one prior that time or not. Earlier he depended on somebody. I don't think he had one at the house on Petaluma Ave when I was born. I wouldn't remember anyway. But he did have a Model A and we lost that during the depression, too. It was a four door sedan. Model A. That motor was new, I thought it was, it looked pretty good.

How were the roads at that time?

Well, they we all 2-lane, concrete not asphalt in those days and every section had the tar across there when you hit those because you couldn't build one big slab of concrete, endless length of it so it had to be in sections so when those things started cracking then they'd patch them, with

tar, you probably remember and also there's still – anything off the beaten path, a lot of them still dirt lanes. Yeah.

Did the car or truck get stuck very often?

No. I can't recall that. The roads were actually pretty good for our road area which wasn't that far out. I think if you got out father, towards the coast or towards Cazaders and then you'd probably would have that happen more often.

Were there any fairs or holidays that were memorable to you?

Well, Fourth of July I think was the most because I was growing up. We had a in those days they didn't regulate fireworks. You could buy whatever they sold and they sold whatever they wanted to. In fact, we had a China Town in Sebastopol which ran from the new theatre in now which used to be Speas McKinley and ran over to Sebastopol Avenue to Pellinis which was Santa Rosa Ave (Sebastopol Ave now) and ran right through Pellinis to the ... Brown Street. That was the China Town – 2 or 2 ½ blocks long or 3. And right where the Diamonds National office, that old lumber yard there in town where there is no longer a lumber yard. They had a Chinese store there and he sold fireworks and they were good ones. And we blowed cards way up in the air in those days. But my dad would not pay for them. We had to do it ... so we had to buy them with our own money but it took very little to buy them. In fact, I can recall my dad actually worked just 2 doors from there, too after I was in Sebastopol back in elementary school. He worked in a planning mill there. Tammy Smith's Planning mill. Right down from there every Friday night after he'd get a paycheck, he'd go over and buy a Chinese lottery ticket. I don't know how much money he even won or lost but on his way home and up the hill the. But, I guess 4th of July and of course, Christmas. Christmas we did have a nice- we has our Hungarian friends our by Fredericks road- good friends- and we'd spend it with them and I can remember decorating their tree or ours and stringing popcorn. Of course we ate a lot of it too. I can remember actual candles on the tree as a few different Christmas. Light candle That's a no no now but you ... those days everybody improvised and nobody ever thought about that (danger) especially if you didn't even have electric in the house. But then no other holidays really stick out too much... Labor Day or Memorial Day. I don't know whether we had Labor Day then. If we did it wasn't that big a deal I don't think. (Bob) There probably wasn't much Labor Day activity here because most of the Labor functions were industrial.

Yeah, right. Ours were farming and I do remember the WPA very well because that was such a very big thing in our day. The leaning on the shovels and they actually did. But they did a lot of work.

Can you think of some projects they did?

They did road work and they had CCC our on Bodega highway and I can remember those guys standing hitchhiking home from on the corner of Main Street and Bodega and they did a lot of watershed work and bridges and cement walls and that type and I know WPA every once in while get some help from them. (CCC) Civilian Conservation Corporation) if they needed more bodies and guys would help out and do that. But I remember them working up

there our corner on the road (corner of Caldera Parquet), this is inside the city. It was on a rural area. But that was when I was 4th or 5th grade. I can remember the WPA.

How about the Apple Fair across from the museum?

Yeah, my dad used to be involved in that because he make I want to find a picture because I want to take it down to the museum, he and a guy named Slim Summerville, they worked together and they made a violin. Its supposed to be the world's biggest at that time. It looked like a base fiddle and was about 16 feet tall and it was in the Chicago World's Fair which was 1939 and we actually had it in the apple show there too. It shows my dad with his cut finger bandaged up and playing the bow on it and of course, he couldn't reach the thing up high. My sister looking for it (picture) and I saw it not too long ago so I'm looking for that but the apple show there that whole lot was empty, where the post office is and Chevron station and all the way back to the vets building because over near the vets building was an apple house – packing house #5 I think it was or #3. Sebastopol Growers Union they used to call it in those days before they changed it to Apple Growers United. We had five packing houses. I remember a guy diving off a 100 feet platform into a big tank of water and lighting it on fire and they really had apple shows. But somewhere along the line, I think I told you earlier that the Sonoma County Fair singed an agreement with apple growers or with Sebastopol, not to have an apple show. That was the big think in the county for the time. They (Sonoma City officials) didn't have the fairgrounds. When they wanted to start the fairground, then they wanted Sebastopol not to have their apple show cause they was unusually about that time, harvest time which would be end of July, August, the gravensteins. I can also when they didn't have the apple show their. They had a ball park there. They played softball and they had light standards and played night soft ball. They were all local teams from Cunningham or surrounding areas, Graton and different leagues and people would watch those. They had bleachers in there. They sued that area for the apple shows but the only thing that stayed there were the bleachers and the light standards. That went on 'til they moved in probably in '38, '39 ... the Parkside school. Then they put the ball park up there up behind that school.

That's where they had their night leaguer softball games?

Sebastopol was very big in softball. In fact, they were very big in baseball. Each time, prior to the war, had a baseball team, Occidental, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol and they played each other on Sundays. No television. All we had was radio. I didn't play for them. I played for Occidental Merchants after the war. My brother in law was selected to the Gonella family so he got me to play for them a couple of years. Were also playing softball, too. Those were big things we did all the time. We had football teams, no Sebastopol, didn't have any but Petaluma and Santa Rosa had seen they called them semi-pros.

When did they build Ives Park?

1939 or '40, before the war. We were one of the first bunch of kids to go in. We went in the night before it opened, climbed a fence, went swimming. I was just a Freshman or sophomore in high school and just starting high school one we had as a great headliner to open up, Helen Colenkovich, 1940 diving champion women. There were diving boards in the pool. They're

not there now. She came up from the city and did an exhibition diving and I'd have to look back in the record but I think it was 1940 or '39.

So did the ball games mover from Parkside down to Ives then or did you still...?

No, no. From Parkside? Uh, yes it did, but right after the war. I was in the 20-30 at the time, the 20-30 club and we built the park. Right after the war we still used the grammar school, elementary school, Parkside there. There was Sebastopol Elementary at the time but while 20-30 club then after we were building the at park, the ball field, the softball field just because we didn't start the little leaguer until 1957. I'll tell you about that later. So I'd say 1947-8-9 somewhere in there the 20-30 started that Ives ball field.

Who were your best friends?

Well, a couple of them are gone, my buddies. One of my best friends, I still see. He was in my class was Charles called chick Casanotti lives in Petaluma. He's the one who lived across the street from me down in Cunningham at the ranch. He's the one who'd dad had the dairy. In fact, we need to swim with the cows down at the lagoon. I remember my dad running him off our ranch one time because we an apple fight or clod fight and we took apple boxes and set them up and he was with somebody else. My brother and I were behind another have a boxes and we'd peek our heads out and throw an apple, try to hit the box and guy is supposed to duck. Well, I didn't duck once and he threw and hit me. He picked up a rock instead of a clod and it really opened me up pretty good. I was hit in the head and it was bleeding. So my dad got mad at him and sent him home (chuckle) but he. I always remained friends. In fact, it was coincidental because he and I, his family and our family moved back into Sebastopol at the same time. So, we started elementary school again in Sebastopol. So, he's the only guy I went all 12 grades through school with. So, he's one of them. There was another fellow who lives out at Hessel, Al Savazzara. He was a few years older than I was but I'm the godfather of his son and he died in his 40's. He had heart attack. He was a banker in town. He married a girl from Occidental and we played a lot of basketball together. He was quite a good basketball player. We, Chuck Casarotti did too, I didn't know him Al Cenezara when I was a little guy though because he went to a different school up at Hessel.

End of Jim's 1st interview of his oral history.